

Trystan and Esyllt

Welsh Triad. Three Enemy-Subduers of the Island of Britain:

Greidiawl Enemy-Subduer son of Envael Adrann, and Gweir of Great Valour, and **Drystan** son of Tallwch.

Trystan and Esyllt

In the interim Trystan ap Tallwch and Esyllt the wife of March y Meirchion, fled into the forest of Clyddon, Golwg Hafddydd, her handmaiden, and Back Bychan his page, carrying pasties and wine with them. A couch of leaves was made for them.

And then March y Meirchion went to complain to Arthur against Trystan, and to entreat him to avenge upon Trystan the insult offered him, because he was nearer of kindred to him [Arthur] than Trystan was, for March y Meirchion was first cousin to Arthur and Trystan was but the nephew-son of a first cousin to Arthur. "I will go, I and my family," said Arthur, "to seek either satisfaction or bloodshed [?] And then they surrounded the wood of Clyddon.

One of the peculiarities of Trystan was that whoever drew blood upon him died, and whoever Trystan drew blood upon died also.

When Esyllt heard the talking around the wood, she trembled against the two hands of Trystan. And then Trystan asked her why she trembled, and she said it was because of fear for him. Then Trystan sang this englyn:

Fair Esyllt, be not fearful:

While I am protecting thee,

Three hundred knights will not succeed in carrying thee off.

Nor three hundred armed men.

And then Trystan rose up and hastily took his sword in his hand, and approached the first battalion as quickly as he could until he met March y Meirchion. And then March y Meirchion said, "I will kill myself in order to kill him." And then the other men all said, "Shame upon us if we interfere with him." Thereupon Trystan went through the three battalions uninjured.

Kai Hir (Kay the Long) was in love with Gowlg Hafddydd. Thus he did : he [went to] the place where Esyllt was and spoke, singing this englyn:

Blessed Eyllt, loving seagull

Speaking in conversation, [I say that]

Trystan has escaped

Eyllt:

Blessed Kai, if it is true what thou sayest,

In conversation with me,

Thou wilt obtain a precious [lit. "golden"] mistress.

Kae:

A golden mistress I desire not

Because of what I have said... (?)

Golwg Hafddydd I seek.

Eyllt:

If it is true the tale

Thou has just told my with thy mouth

Golwg Hafddydd will be thine.

And then March y Meirchion went a second time to Arthur and lamented to him because he obtained neither satisfaction nor blood for his wife. Arthur said, 'I know no counsel to give thee except to send instrumental musicians to sound toward him from afar, and after that to send vocal musicians with englynion (epigrams) of praise.' So they did. Thereupon Trystan called to him the artists and gave them handfuls of gold and silver. After that someone was sent to him concerning peace: namely, Gwalchmei. And Gwalchmei sang this englyn:

Tumultuous is the nature of the wave,

When the sea is at its height.

Who art though, mysterious warrior?

Trystan:

Tumultuous are the waves and the thunder.

In their bursting forth let them be tumultuous

In the day of conflict I am Trystan

Gwalchmei:

Trystan of the faultless speech,

Who in the day of battle, would not retreat,

A companion of thine was Gwalchmei.

Trystan:

I would do for Gwalchmei in that day,

*In the which the work of slaughter is let loose,
That which one brother would not do for another*

Gwalchmei:

*Trystan, endowed with brilliant qualities,
Whose spear has oft been shivered in the toil of war
I am Gwalchmei the nephew of Arthur.*

Trystan:

*Gwalchmei, there swifter than Mydrin,
Shouldst thou be in danger,
I would cause blood to flow till it reached the knees*

Gwalchmei:

*Trystan, for thy sake would I strive
Until my wrist should fail me;
Also for thee I would do my utmost*

Trystan:

*I ask it in defiance,
I ask it not through fear--
Who are the warriors before me?*

Gwalchmei:

*Trystan, of distinguished qualities
Are they not known to thee?
It is the household of Arthur that comes.*

Trystan:

*Arthur will I not shun,
To nine hundred combats will I dare him--
If I am slain, I wil also slay.*

Gwalchmei:

*Trystan, the friend of damsels,
Before commencing the work of strife,
The best of all things is peace.*

Trystan:

*Let me but have my sword upon my thigh,
And my right hand to defend me,
And I myself will be more formidable than they all*

Gwalchmei:

*Trystan of brilliant qualities,
Before exciting the tumult of conflict--
Reject not Arthur as a friend.*

Trystan:

*Gwalchmei, for thy sake will I deliberate,
And with my mouth I utter it--
As I am loved, so will I love.*

Gwalchmei:

*Trystan, of aspiring mind,
The shower wets a hundred oaks.
Come to an interview with thy kinsman.*

Trystan:

*Gwalchmei of persuasive answers,
The shower wets a hundred furrows.
I will go where're thou wilt.*

Then Trystan went with Gwalchmei to Arthur, and Gwalchmei sang this englyn:

Arthur, of courteous replies,
The shower wets a hundred heads.
Here is Trystan, be thou joyful.

Then Arthur sang:

Gwalchmei, of faultless answers,
The shower wets a hundred dwellings.
A welcome to Trystan, my nephew.

Notwithstanding that, Trystan said nothing, and Arthur sang the second englyn:

Worthy Trystan, chief of the host,
Love thy race, remember the past;
Am I not the Chief of the Tribe?
Still Trystan said nothing, and Arthur sang:

Trystan, leader of onsets,
Take equal with the best,
But leave the sovereignty to me.

Yet again Trystan said nothing, and Arthur sang this englyn:

Trystan, wise and mighty chieftain,
Love they kindred, one shall harm thee,

Let there be no coldness between friend and friend.

Finally, Trystan responded, and sang this englyn to Arthur, his uncle:

Arthur, to thee will I attend,

To thy command will I submit,

And that thou wishest will I do.

And then peace was made by Arthur between Trystan and March y Meirchion and Arthur conversed with the two of them in turn, and neither of them was willing to be without Esyllt.

Then Arthur adjudged her to one while the leaves should be on the wood, and to the other during the time that the leaves should not be on the wood, the husband to have the choice.

And the latter chose the time when the leaves should not be on the wood, because the night is longest during that season. And Arthur announced that to Esyllt, and she said.

"Blessed be the judgment and he who gave it!" And Esyllt sang this englyn;

Three trees are good in nature:

the holly, the ivy, and the yew,

which keep their leaves throughout their lives:

I am Trystan's as long as he lives!

And in this way March y Meirchion lost his wife forever. And so ends the story.